1: Tew E-4 (no date) 1950 FT7 Yao FT7

every adult member is a matrilineal descendant of a single ancestress, or a spouse of one of these people. All husbands are called *alamu* by the male members of the descent group, but husbands call each other by the kinship terms for older and younger brother (i.e. *acimwesi* or *mpwanga*) according to the seniority of their wives. Similarly undifferentiated in kinship terms are the wives of all men of the descent group, who call each other 'sister'.

The husband is expected to work in his wife's garden, to help his mother-in-law, and also, in the early stages of marriage, to avoid her. His attitude to his father-in-law is one of respect, relaxing as time goes on. His attitude to his wife's brother is also one of respect, which covers feelings of latent hostility. Although husband and wife's brother co-operate in affairs relating to the woman and her children (e.g. they jointly consult the diviner in case of illness, and the brother-in-law hears grievances the husband may have against his wife), there are elements of conflict arising from their competition for the affection of the woman and her children.

Patrilocal marriages are the rule in certain cases. The village headman commonly has his wife in his own village. At his death his widow may return to her own village, but if her daughters have married locally she may stay, and one of her sons, as warden of his sisters, will also stay and marry patrilocally, as did his father, the headman. Thus a new matrilineal descent group, linked to that of the headman by a patrilineal link, develops. In every generation the number of separate but related matrilineal descent groups would double, and at such a rate of proliferation it might be expected that any village would contain many family groups. In fact, however, most members of a village can trace their descent from a common ancestress removed not more than about five generations. There are two reasons for this degree of homogeneity in the kin-grouping in the villages. One is that the villages tend to split up as they become too large and complex. The other is that the introduction of a new matrilineal descent group is often avoided by a cross-cousin marriage by the headman of the village or the warden of a sorority group.

There is a joking-relationship between cross-cousins, that is, for example, between the village headman's children and his sisters' children. The latter, as members of his descent group, have interests and loyalties opposed to those of his own children. Although there is a strong tradition of cross-cousin marriage, such marriages are said to be likely to be unstable.

Betrothal and Marriage

Child betrothal was common among the Yao. Acceptance of a loin-cloth and the wearing of it was token of betrothal, giving the groom exclusive rights over the girl.[1] The negotiations for an adult marriage are conducted by senior matrilineal kinsmen of the parties, who at the subsequent ceremony act as witnesses or sureties to the marriage. Usually the senior is the mother's brother, and the junior the brother. The act of validation, the *Cingoma* rite, takes place some time after the husband and wife have been living together. They meet in the hut of the woman for the rite, which consists in eating two pots of porridge, prepared by the female relatives of each party. The man's people bring a cockerel and the woman's a hen for relish. The exchange of food symbolizes the exchange of members of each matrilineal kin group, which is

[1] Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, p. 118; Johnston, 1897, pp. 411–13.

1: Tew E-4 (no date) 1950 FT7 Yao FT7

expressed also in the speeches by the marriage sureties. The couple are exhorted to refer disputes to the sureties, and to consult the diviner in case of sickness.[1] After the rite these two sureties have special responsibilities towards the couple; grievances are referred to them, and they must be present when adultery cases are heard in court. If the marriage witness ceremony has not been performed, the relationship is not regarded as legal and no adultery compensation can be claimed by the husband. 585

Divorce used to be a private affair, which was merely signalized by one party giving to the other an arrow as a token of separation.[2] Nowadays all divorce cases go to court. The woman is usually asked to choose between her husband and the adulterer, and the compensation paid to the former, if she decides to leave him, is higher—amounting to about 10*s*. A man can be sent away from the village by his wife's kin, but if he has given no grounds for divorce he can claim compensation and will also take back any gifts made to his wife. A few small gifts to his mother-in-law are not reclaimed. Divorces are easily obtained and frequent. Grounds for the divorce of a man may include failure to pay hut tax, one of the specific duties of the husband. 586 [431]

The custom of making a marriage payment is recorded by Johnson[3] (on the east coast of Lake Nyasa) as a relatively new adoption. When given it is divided between the bride's father, mother, and mother's brother and brother.[4] 583 177

Slavery

Domestic slavery was an important institution in the Yao social system. Slaves were obtained by capture, purchase, or in compensation for injury.[5] A man would pay a debt by giving slaves (wives or members of his matrilineal kin group) to his creditors.[6] A man might voluntarily enslave himself to a man having charge of many women, as a means of obtaining a wife.[7] The children of a free man and a slave woman were not emancipated, as their father could not take them from the village of their mother's master, who had the right to sell them.[8] Slaves took part in the ordinary life of the village; women slaves ranked as junior wives of their masters and shared the usual work of women. Men might be supplied with guns for hunting or might accompany their masters to war, trade for them, spin, weave, sew, make baskets.[9] The institution of domestic slavery was an expression of a dominant motif in Yao culture—the association of status with a large number of dependents. Its abolition by the British was in itself a major blow to the prestige and authority of the chiefs. 567 [554]

Information about the social organization of the Yao in Portuguese East Africa is scanty, but it is in agreement with what is known of the Nyasaland Yao; Heckel, who knew the Yao in Lindi district, Tanganyika Territory, confirms the correctness of Stannus's account of the South Nyasa Yao. 184 602

The Yao came into Nyasaland in small parties of kinsmen. Their experience and their superior weapons soon enabled them to dominate the Nyanja among whom they settled, and today they dominate the population of the Southern Province. They are organized into loose groups of villages, under petty, independent chiefs. They seem 175 [621] [631]

[1] Stannus, 4, 1922, p. 245; Hynde, 1893; Johnson, 3, 1922, pp. 69–73; Macdonald, 1882, vol. i; Werner, 1906, pp. 129–32.
[2] 1922, pp. 72–3.
[3] Stannus, 4, 1922, p. 280.
[4] Stannus, 4, 1922, p. 280.
[5] Werner, 1906, pp. 152–3; Stannus, 4, 1922, p. 237.
[6] Stigand, 1909, p. 122 (not a reliable source).
[7] Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, pp. 166–7.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Werner, 1906, p. 273.

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT? Yao FT?

If the suitor receives a favourable reply, he informs his father and the elders of his village and then goes to the girl's village where he begins to build a house and spends much time performing duties for the girl's parents, such as hoeing. If, after a month, he is approved, the girl's people send a messenger to the man's village, asking, "Have you missed anyone from your village?" The answer is, "Yes, Ilo-and-Ilo," to which the reply is given, "Well, he is here with us." The man's people then arrange to come to the girl's village on a certain day. 584

On the appointed day, the two sponsors (*nguwe*) on each side, meet in the village open space and being assured that there is nothing to prevent the marriage and the man and woman being willing, the tie is made. There is no formal ceremony or token of marriage between the man and woman. Porridge is cooked for the sponsors and a fowl provided. The back of the fowl is broken by the elder sponsor as a sign of the compact. The man is exhorted by his sponsors to be a credit to them in his new village, while the woman is told by her mother and her aunt that they expect her to live an exemplary life. The man's chief sponsor tells him that no longer is he a member of his own village, but belongs to the girl's sponsor, and the converse is told to the girl. Hereafter, in all matters relating to them as married people, the girl will consult her husband's sponsor and vice versa. The elder sponsor on both sides is called *nguwe wakupona*, borrowing from Chinyanja, "a log lying down," and is usually an uncle; the junior is commonly the brother of the bridegroom. 585

On leaving the girl's village, the *nguwe wakupona* will say, "You will see me no more in this village but this, my younger companion; if you see him, you will know he comes from me." The sponsors' responsibilities last so long as the pair lives, unless they separate for some reason. Thus, should the husband's grain die or should he lose his axe, the woman reports to his sponsor. If the husband kills an antelope, the sponsors receive some portion of the meat. If a village is to be moved, the inhabitants consult the sponsors of every married couple. In this way, the sponsors become the repository of all the events of the married life of the husband and wife and in case of any dispute or untoward event, theirs is the accredited testimony on family matters. The account given by Macdonald,[1] I venture to think may be incorrect.

Should the *nguwe wakupona* die, the junior sponsor takes his place and a new junior is appointed. The new *nguwe wakupona* sends a message to the other party's sponsor telling him of the change, at the same time presenting him with a fowl. As he may be acting for a number of people, he may have to distribute several fowls; later, he visits his confreres.

Following the marriage compact and the departure of the sponsor, the married pair go away quietly to the house the man has built for his wife, or she may wait until evening, and, if she is shy, she may be accompanied by an elder sister, or may be sent with food for her husband. Consummation may not take place for a day or two, after which the hus- [591]

[1] Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

585 dress of her married life begins. The man and woman live together peaceably enough as a rule, each attending to his own sphere of work. The man builds the house, the woman 462 made the floors; she sweeps and cooks, she is the hewer of wood and drawer of water. The man hunts, fishes, makes mats, baskets, the grain store, game traps, and bark-cloth; he looks after the tobacco, and makes the snuff, while his wife brews the beer. He it is who fashions the gourd vessels and carves the spoons, while the woman is the potter (Pl. III, 4) and pipe-maker. Together they hoe and together they harvest, but to the woman falls the monotonous drudgery of pounding and sifting the corn for flour.

842 The Yao have a custom like that of the Anyanja. A sister brings to the house of the [522] newly wedded pair a log of green wood from a mbanga tree which is very hard; the log may be two feet in diameter and four feet long. Should the bride not become pregnant [558] before it is burned away, the husband is laughed at and they may both be teased by having many logs brought to the house. A man who has no children is much despised and there is a saying, "He must have eaten some ground-nuts," punning on the word for a thick-[837] skinned variety of ground-nut, chimbumila, a word which also means sterility. An impotent man may, with the consent of his wife, introduce some male friend into the house, any children born in consequence being claimed as the husband's. He usually chooses some friend from a distance to obviate any attachment springing up between him and the wife. Two married couples may, all consenting, exchange consorts for the night, but they never live together like this for long periods.

582 There is one well-defined marriage taboo; a man may not marry a woman of his own [611] clan. In the old days, he was also restricted to his own tribe, except in the case of slave wives and wives by capture. Since the clan is inherited from the mother,[1] a man may not [587] marry the daughters of his maternal aunts, but he may marry his other female cousins. He may not marry two sisters nor a deceased wife's sister; neither do two brothers marry two sisters.

595 The number of wives is limited only by the husband's ability to provide for them. In addition to free wives, a man might formerly have a number of slave wives. The head wife is called *bwanta*, the other wives, *wampanda*. The word given by Macdonald, *akwapa*,[2] meaning the junior wives, is a Chinyanja word and, I think, wrongly applied.

582 It has been said that a man always marries into the village of his wife. For this reason, [842] female children are always prized as it means an increase in the number of able-bodied men added to the village. In rare cases, the wife might be taken to the husband's village, [583] as is the Anyanja practice.[3] This, of course, is true in the case of chiefs and headmen. Here, we may also note that no payment is made for the wife and no dowry is received with her.

584 To revert to betrothal, occasionally the spouses will not agree to the marriage and a 843 runaway match takes place, but in the end, the marriage is usually regularised by the spouses coming to an agreement. If, however, the woman has in the meantime become

[1] Vide infra, p. 208. [2] Op. cit., p. 154. [3] Stannus, op. cit., p. 208.